NEGLECT OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

TO MEET THE LAWFUL DEMANDS OF THE

HALF-BREEDS OF THE NORTHWEST.

The following letter from Ex-Judge Matthew Ryan, so well known throughout the North-west, speaks for itself. It is regarded as a clear statement of the principal cause of discontent in the North-west, and should be read by all who desire to be informed on the question of the rebellion now raging on the shores of the Saskatchewan. It will be noticed that this letter was published nearly nine months since, but like many other warnings had no effect upon the haughty authorities at Ottawa.

Mr. Ryan was complimented by not a few upon the information, and spirit, of his letter. The following was the appreciation of one of the highest judicial functionaries of the Dominion:

"I thank you for the newspaper containing your recommendation of the treatment which ought to be pur-
"sued towards the half-breeds, and your remarks upon that subject. The letter is just what I would have ex-
"pected from you—well-written, judicious and temperate. Your experience and advice are really valuable.
"Why not publish such matter in Ottawa, where it would be read by those to whom it is most valuable? I am
"sure you would be thanked for it."

THE NORTH-WEST HALF-BREED QUESTION.

To the Editor of the Manitoba Free Press.

SIR,—In common with many others, no doubt, I expected that the opening of the sixth Council of the North-west would be marked by some reference to the state of disquietude manifest in the half-breed settlement of St. Laurent and adjacent places. But not a word was breathed on the subject. His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor while commending to the attention of the Council "a measure for the encouragment of tree-planting" could say nothing of the needs and lawful demands of a large portion of the population whose services in the past were beyond all price, and whose increasing numbers and intelligence would seem to entitle their peculiar interests to at least respectful consideration. Had the seat of Government not been removed from Battleford—where the half-breeds have strength, and some influence,—to suit the sordid views of Mr. Dewdney, it is possible that the speech from the Throne would have taken a wider range than we read of; that, for instance, the land claims of the half-breeds would, at least, have ranked with "cattle-herds," "boarding-houses" and "billiard-tables." My interest in the welfare of the half-breed population of Manitoba and the Northwest dates from the 17th May, 1875, when I was appointed one of two commissioners "to ascertain and determine the several persons (half-breeds,) entitled to receive grants of land (1,400,000 acres), and to receive scrip, under the provisions of the Acts 33 and 37 Vic. At that time I knew little of the people whose interests were thus committed to my judgment, but had read in the Earl of Southesk's book on the "Saskatchewan and Rocky Mountains" that "a half-breed dressed and educated like an Englishman would not seem at all remarkable in London society;" and had also read as follows in Butler's "Lone Land": "Now, had the country bordering on Red River been an unpeopled wilderness, the plan carried out in effecting the transfer of land. in the Northwest from the Hudson's Bay to the Crown, and from the Crown to the Dominion of Canada, would have been an eminently wise one. But, unfortunately for its wisdom, there were some 15,000 persons living in peaceful possession of the soil thus transferred, and these 15,000 persons very naturally objected to have themselves and possessions signed away without one word of consent, or one word of approval Nay, more than that, the straggling pioneers (from Eastern Provinces) had on many an occasion taunted the half-breed with what would happen when the irresistible march of events had thrown the country into the arms of Canada"

The information thus conveyed did not abate my desire to discharge the duties of my commission faithfully; and, seeing that

"I have sustained my share of worldly shocks"

in this land, it may be allowed to me to state that not only was "the pleasure of the Minister at the progress being made in the duties of the commission" communicated to me in the subsequent month of July, but at the

close of the work the Deputy Minister formally reported that "it was satisfactory to see how much had been done in so short a time, to the satisfaction of all parties in the Province, and without, as far as he knew, a single instance of complaint."

Having been appointed on the 1st of January, 1876, a stipendiary magistrate for the Northwest Territories, I was also informed by the Minister of Justice that my commission to investigate land claims was to be considered intact for another year, in order to allow of half-breeds of the Northwest who were unable to attend the sittings of the Commissioners in Manitoba, to establish their claims before me. In the discharge of this duty, I found that a large number of half-breeds had no claim under the Act, not having been residents of Manitoba on the date of the "transfer," 15th July, 1870. I could also see that this exclusion caused much discontent, and I did not fail to urge, from time to time, that the proper remedy should be applied. At length, on the 2nd August, 1879, the Northwest Council, of which I was then a member, ex officio, adopted a resolution urging, inter alia, upon "the early and earnest attention of His Excellency the Governor-General in Council":—

"That in view of the fact that grants of land, and issues of scrip, were made to the half-breeds of Manitoba towards the extinguishment of the Indian title to the lands of that province, there will undoubtedly be general dissatisfaction among the half-breeds of the said territories unless they receive some like consideration.

"That this consideration would most tend to the advantage of the half-breeds were it given in the form of a non-transferable location ticket for, say, one hundred and sixty acres to each half-breed head of a family and each half-breed child of parents residents in the said territories at the time of the transfer thereof to Canada,—the ticket to be issued immediately to any half-breed, eighteen years of age or over, on furnishing evidence of claim, and to every child on arriving at that age and furnishing the necessary evidence.

"That each half-breed holding such a location ticket should be allowed to locate it upon any unoccupied Dominion lands, but the title of the land so entered should remain in the Crown for ten years; and if after the expiration of three years after such entry the half-breed locatee have made no improvements on the land his claims thereto shall be subject to forfeiture.

"That in order to induce those half-breeds who now procure their livelihood by hunting on the plains to abandon their present mode of life and settle on their locations, by which course it alone appears possible to avert the great destitution with which they are threatened, owing to the imminent early extinction of the buffalo, aid in agricultural implements and seeds be allowed them for three years."

These recommendations were so far effectual that in the Dominion Lands Act of 1879—42 Vic., chap. 31—power is delegated to the Governor-in-Council: "To satisfy any claims existing in connection with the extinguishment of the Indian title, preferred by half-breeds resident in the Northwest Territories outside the limits of Manitoba, on the fifteenth day of July, one thousand eight hundred and seventy, by granting land to such persons, to such extent, and on such terms and conditions as may be deemed expedient."

This sub-section appears, also, in the Lands Act of 1883, 46 Vic., chap. 17, but nothing further has yet been done in the premises. In a letter which I have lately received from a gentleman in high position in the Territories, it is written: "For what reasons the Government has not so far done anything in the direction indicated is a mystery to me. The half-breeds feel that they are slighted, and the feeling of discontent is daily growing among them."

In November, 1878, I was interviewed at Ottawa by a member of the Globe staff, and having informed him of the then recent action of the Northwest Council, as told above, I added: "If the half-breeds are induced to take up land and settle, they will become, because of their kindly nature, and temperate and active habits, a good population, and be very valuable as neighbors and assistants to new settlers from the older Provinces and countries. There can be no greater mistake than to underrate the qualities of the half-breed to the extent now somewhat prevalent."

What I then said was founded upon an extended experience, and is still my conviction. I cannot therefore feel otherwise than desirous that the movement in the West in behalf of the deserving half-breed population may soon result in the largest success.

15th July, 1884.

MATTHEW RYAN.

Note the claims "outside" cause the trouble.

With the com-
pliments of the
Writer

1885
Ryan